

**For Immediate Release**

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**Contact: Michael Williams**

(850) 717-4940, [Michael.Williams@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Michael.Williams@myfloridahouse.gov)

**Kristen McDonald**

(850) 717-5129, [Kristen.McDonald@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Kristen.McDonald@myfloridahouse.gov)

## **Florida House Passes Comprehensive Water Policy Bill**

**Tallahassee, Fla.**—The Florida House of Representatives today passed CS/HB 7003 relating to water resources. The bill is a comprehensive approach to addressing Florida's water policy initiatives.

"I applaud Chair Caldwell on the passage of the House's bipartisan water policy legislation," said House Speaker Steve Crisafulli (R-Merritt Island). "Water is one of Florida's most precious resources. Addressing our state's water challenges is not an issue that can be fully addressed in one legislative session, but our bill lays a solid foundation for future efforts to strengthen Florida's critical water resources."

"With the passage of this bill today, the House has taken a long-term, comprehensive approach toward solving the water quality and supply challenges facing our entire state, rather than just focusing on the problems of any one particular region," said State Representative Matt Caldwell (R-North Fort Myers), Chairman of the State Affairs Committee and sponsor of HB 7003. "Our bill modernizes existing water policies and provides scientifically sound, responsible solutions to protect the health of our waterways and develop greater, reliable access to clean water for Floridians."

The bill makes a number of revisions to Florida's water policy. All first magnitude springs in the state and all second magnitude springs within state or federally owned lands will be designated as Priority Florida Springs (PFS). The bill requires water management districts (WMDs) to develop new or revise existing recovery or prevention strategies concurrently with the establishment or re-evaluation of minimum flows and levels (MFLs). The bill requires the WMDs to include in their 5-year water resource development work program an annual funding plan for each of the 5- years for water resource and water supply development projects contained in each approved regional water supply plan (RWSP). RWSPs must be amended to include any water supply development and water resource development project identified in a recovery or prevention strategy and for the amended RWSP to be approved concurrently with the recovery or prevention strategy

The bill requires the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), by December 1, 2018, to complete an assessment of water quality for each PFS for which an impairment determination has not been made, establish total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) for all PFS deemed to be impaired, and establish basin management action plans (BMAP) for impaired PFS. In addition,

persons engaged in agriculture within the geographic area encompassed by a BMAP for a PFS are required to implement best management practices (BMP) or conduct water quality monitoring. DEP is also required to form a working group responsible for collecting and evaluating scientific information on the effects of nutrients on springs, developing a public education plan, and developing projects to reduce nutrient impacts where sewage treatment and disposal systems in springs areas represent a source of excess nitrate-nitrite that must be controlled to meet TMDLs. DEP is also authorized to award funds to address certain septic tank issues contingent on an appropriation. Further, DEP is required to establish an interagency agreement with the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD), the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), and the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) to develop and implement uniform water supply planning, consumptive water use permitting, and resource protection programs for the area encompassed by the Central Florida Water Initiative (CFWI). DEP is also authorized to adopt by rule a specific surface water classification for certain waterbodies used as a source of drinking water.

The SFWMD is required to continue exercising the state's authority to allocate water and assign priorities among other water uses served by the Central and Southern Florida Project (Project) and to provide recommendations to the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers that are consistent with all SFWMD programs and plans when developing or implementing joint water control plans or regulation schedules required for the Project.

The bill updates and restructures the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Act to reflect and build upon DEP's completion of BMAPs for Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee Estuary, and the St. Lucie River and Estuary; DEP's continuing development of a BMAP for the inland portion of the Caloosahatchee River watershed; and DACS' implementation of BMPs in the three basins. The bill designates the Lake Okeechobee BMAP as the phosphorus control element of the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Protection Program, designating BMAPs adopted for the Caloosahatchee River and the St. Lucie River watersheds as the pollutant control programs for those watersheds, and requiring the BMAPs to contain an implementation schedule for pollutant load reductions consistent with adopted TMDLs. It also directs the SFWMD to revise its Works of the District Rule to be consistent with the Lake Okeechobee BMAP and report to the coordinating agencies the results of water quality monitoring conducted by landowners outside of the Everglades Agricultural Area who do not choose to participate in the DACS' BMP program. The bill also eliminates duplicative permits by relying on the BMAPs as the basis for water quality regulation in the Lake Okeechobee, the Caloosahatchee River, and the St. Lucie River watersheds.

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